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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/PPD and EUR/NB

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIANS LIKE USA BUT GWOT SUPPORT IS TEPID; POLL HELPS  
REFINE STRATEGIC OUTREACH OBJECTIVES

1. SUMMARY: An Embassy-commissioned poll funded by EUR/PPD showed that a strong majority of Lithuanians continue to view the United States favorably. The survey also showed a positive correlation between knowing an American and having a positive image of the United States. Not all the news was good -- 82 percent of Lithuanians are opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which feature the participation of Lithuanian troops. Our findings are leading us to focus on targeted outreach to non-elites while continuing to emphasize policy outreach to elites. END SUMMARY.

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THE GOOD NEWS: TO KNOW US IS TO LIKE US  
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2. The survey, done for us by the Gallup agency, had some interesting highlights:

-- A solid majority of Lithuanians (71 percent) holds a positive opinion of the United States. Among all age groups, youth (aged 15-29) view us most favorably (78 percent positive), compared to 65 percent of the oldest demographic (age 50-74). Urban respondents (77 percent) were more likely than rural residents to view us favorably.

-- Respondents who had met an American personally were more likely to hold a positive opinion of the United States and its importance as Lithuania's partner.

-- Over two-thirds of Lithuanians expressed a desire to visit the United States, and well over half of the respondents reported that they were interested in additional information about the United States.

-- Over 57 percent have never met an American. Among rural residents (68 percent) and respondents with the lowest income (73 percent), contact with Americans is particularly limited.

3. USA: A LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

-- Lithuanians most often associate the United States with prosperity and economic opportunity. When asked what comes to mind when considering the United States, over 41 percent of respondents replied with a variation of "rich" or "opportunity." By contrast, only 8 percent cited "democracy." Other popular associations included Hollywood, basketball, and the dollar.

-- While a large majority of Lithuanians want to visit the United States, the number was even larger among youth: 88 percent of respondents aged 15-29 would like to visit the United States.

4. STRONG SUPPORT FOR NATO AND THE EU

-- The policy-related survey questions revealed a steady western orientation of Lithuanian public opinion. Further, the findings indicate an enduring recognition of the importance of NATO and the United States as reliable protectors of Lithuanian security. The majority of respondents support Lithuanian membership in NATO (67 percent) and the EU (76 percent). Support for both institutions tends to be strongest among Lithuanians who are urban, young, or who have met an American.

-- Overall, Lithuanians approve of the role the United States plays in promoting democracy, peace, and economic growth throughout the world. Clear majorities voiced their approval of U.S. leadership in all three spheres.

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OUR VULNERABILITIES  
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5. Thirty-nine percent of respondents view the EU as Lithuania's most important partner, compared to only 11 percent who think the United States should be the country's key partner. This Eurocentric view could become even more pronounced as EU membership becomes more a part of daily life (i.e., adoption of the Euro currency).

-- Our high approval rating is lowest among older males, particularly those living in rural areas, with a below-average income, or identifying with a minority ethnic group (Polish or Russian).

-- Almost 18 percent of respondents associate America with "aggression" or "war." Respondents also mentioned materialism, visa

restrictions, and Iraq when asked for negative associations.

-- Equally large majorities of Lithuanians (82 percent) oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite those strong views, over half of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the efforts of their own troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and 50 percent support the U.S.-led war on terror.

#### ----- HONING OUR OUTREACH CAMPAIGN -----

16. The survey gives us a benchmark by which we can measure our MPP strategic goal of having American values respected in Lithuania. The findings highlight the importance of personal outreach and suggest a two-pronged approach to our outreach plan to target three different constituents. To use campaign terminology, we want to fortify our base, win over the undecided, and reduce our negatives.

#### FORTIFYING OUR BASE -----

17. To fortify our base, we plan to:

-- Continue our policy outreach with future leaders. The urban elite like us and are interested in policy. We should engage them directly in explaining our policies so that they can see why we have arrived at the decisions we have taken. This frank approach earns some converts, but also develops mutual respect for those who still disagree.

-- Face-to-face outreach is essential. PAS will continue its emphasis on generating speaking opportunities for Embassy personnel throughout the country.

-- As we compete to attract talented young Lithuanians seeking educational and career opportunities, PAS will continue to deploy a speech and multimedia presentation specifically designed for high school audiences. (See detailed explanation below).

18. The 15-29 age category views us more favorably (78 percent) than any other age group, but their support could diminish in the future if we are not proactive. Youth will naturally be drawn toward the EU as work, study and travel opportunities there are simpler to pursue than in the USA. One troubling indication of this trend has been the decline in the participation of young Lithuanians in the "Work and Travel" program for university students.

19. To bolster our positives with this critical age group, PAS prepared and the Ambassador inaugurated a "High School stump speech" addressing youth issues such as what American youth are up to, travel and study opportunities in the United States, and demystifying the visa process. Embedded in the speech is a five-minute multimedia presentation about U.S. schools using modified text from an IIP e-journal on studying in the United States. PAS plans to continue to upgrade the presentation and is seeking Washington support to make a video that can be used worldwide. The Ambassador's first two deliveries of this presentation were very successful, and 200 students enthusiastically welcomed the DCM when he gave the same speech in February.

#### WOONING THE UNDECIDED -----

110. Over half of all respondents felt "not well enough informed" about life in the United States. We need to strengthen our message that:

-- The United States is a friend and partner of Lithuania.

-- We encourage business, travel and study in the USA.

-- We admire Lithuania's achievements and appreciate Lithuania's commitment to advancing the cause of freedom;

111. We will target those "non-elites" with low-cost cultural programming and visits to give them a better understanding of America and her people. For example:

-- Deploying mission speakers to smaller towns for speaking engagements and media opportunities;

-- Using the new American Corner, which is located in a mid-sized city in the northern part of the country, as a platform to reach out to smaller towns in the area.

-- Recruiting Fulbrighters, local and visiting American artists to perform in small towns.

#### REDUCING OUR NEGATIVES -----

112. Lithuanians may not support the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they largely approve of their troops' level of support. Our plan is to highlight the admirable work of Lithuanian troops in support of coalition operations to promote greater pride in Lithuanian efforts and accomplishments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

-- One investment that paid great dividends was sending the head of Lithuanian State Television to visit Afghanistan. He visit so intrigued him that he returned for two months to film a documentary of about his compatriots in the Lithuanian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Ghor province. The documentary premiered at the largest theater in Vilnius and is being shown on national television.

-- PAS also produces and distributes a regular fact sheet on Iraq listing some of the successes Iraq has achieved since its liberation. The fact sheet compiles for GOL officials essential building blocks to explain how the Lithuanian deployment in Iraq contributes to stabilization and democracy.

13. Small-town older males (especially from minority groups) for whom life has not greatly improved since the breakup of the Soviet Union are another group we will target with low-budget outreach activities. In addition to visits and cultural programming mentioned above, we will also:

-- Seek more visibility in minority media. The Ambassador did an interview with a Polish Language radio station in February which went out to this small-town target audience.

-- Promote civil society and tolerance: Tolerance programming will help us reach out to non-Lithuanian minorities, who are currently our weakest demographic in terms of support.

COMMENT

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14. The high level of pro-U.S. feelings in Lithuania reflects the longstanding friendship between our countries. Preserving our broad popular support here, however, will require dedicated effort and resources to maintain. We are grateful for EUR/PPD's support of the poll, and hope to repeat the poll annually as a measurement tool of our PD outreach and our MPP strategies.

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